I, II, III JOHN

FELLOWSHIP OF ETERNAL LIFE

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

GUARDING THE TRUTH

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I, II, III John

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Introduction

The epistles of John are a call back to the beginning — back to the eternal life that was with the Father and manifested to us, back to walking in the light as He is in the light, back to loving one another with the love that God has poured into our hearts. Written in a time of division, deception, and spiritual decline, these letters speak with urgent relevance today.

In many cities there are dozens of congregations and ministries, yet little practical fellowship among them. Believers often ignore one another, compete with one another, and sometimes even speak evil of one another. This situation grieves the heart of God. John writes not to condemn but to restore: 'that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3).

These studies aim to bring us back to what is real: the fellowship of the eternal life, the shining of the divine light, the love of the brothers, and the guarding of the truth. In these short but piercing epistles, John gives us the tests of reality: life, light, love, and truth. May this word cut through today's confusion and recover among God's people the testimony that Jesus prayed for: 'that they all may be one... that the world may believe' (John 17:21).

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. 1 John 1:1–4 — The Word of Life Manifested
3. 1 John 1:5–10 — Walking in the Light
4. 1 John 2:1–11 — Advocacy and the New Commandment
5. 1 John 2:12–29 — Overcoming the World, Warning of Antichrists
6. 1 John 3:1–24 — Children of God, Love in Deed and Truth
7. 1 John 4:1–21 — Testing the Spirits, God Is Love
8. 1 John 5:1–21 — Faith, Victory, Assurance
9. 2 John — Walking in Truth and Love, Guarding Against Deceivers
10. 3 John — Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius
11. Addendum — Love and Truth: The Two Balances of John

1 John 1:1–10 — The Word of Life and Walking in the Light

1 John 1:1–4 — The Word of Life Manifested

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—
2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—
3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Exposition:

John opens with a thunderous testimony — not an argument, but a proclamation of reality. He points to the eternal Word who became flesh, whom they heard, saw with their eyes, gazed upon, and touched with their hands. What John presents is not a system of belief or a set of teachings, but a living Person — the Word of life manifested in the flesh.

This is a call to return to the beginning: to Christ Himself as the content and center of the Christian faith according to God's New Testament economy. Everything depends on our contact with Him. When Christ is no longer the living reality known, experienced, and enjoyed, what remains is only an outward form — something bearing His name, yet lacking His life.

John's goal is explicit: "that you also may have fellowship with us." Fellowship (koinonia) is not social activity or doctrinal alignment — it is joint participation in the divine life. When believers live by this life, fellowship springs up spontaneously and crosses every barrier — cultural, denominational, and personal.

The tragedy today is that many claim to know Christ but refuse fellowship with believers outside their circle. John would call this walking in darkness (v. 6). The KJV's phrase is sharp: "we lie, and do not the truth."

Finally, John writes "that your joy may be full." Joy is not an individualistic matter but the atmosphere of shared fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the saints. True joy cannot exist where believers are isolated or divided.

1 John 1:5–10 — Walking in the Light

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.
8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Exposition:

John now declares the central message they heard directly from Christ: God is light. Light is not merely a description but a declaration of God's very being — pure, holy, transparent, with no darkness at all.

John is the only apostle to give us three absolute declarations of God's being: God is Spirit (John 4:24), God is Light (1 John 1:5), and God is Love (1 John 4:8, 16). Together they reveal the Triune God: the Father as love, the Son as light, and the Spirit as spirit. The Father initiates in love, the Son manifests as light, and the Spirit makes this fellowship real within us. Walking in the light is therefore not just an ethical matter but living in the shining of the Son, enjoying the Father's love, and following the Spirit's inward leading.

Fellowship (koinonia) is joint participation, common sharing. To have fellowship is to share in the communion that eternally exists between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. True fellowship is both vertical and horizontal; walking in the light brings believers into fellowship with God and with one another. If we claim fellowship yet remain isolated or divided, John says we are still in darkness.

Here John exercises his unique apostolic ministry — the mending ministry. Peter was made a fisher of men, catching the Jews at Pentecost and opening the door for the Gentiles at Cornelius' house. Paul was the wise master builder, laying Christ as the foundation and building up the churches. By the end of the first century, heresies and divisions were tearing the net. John's ministry came last to repair the breach, bringing believers back to what was from the beginning and restoring the flow of divine life, light, and love.

John's wording is deliberate: "the blood of Jesus His Son." This affirms Christ's humanity (Jesus) and deity (His Son). Against the Docetists who denied His true humanity, John insists that the cleansing blood is literal and real — shed in time and space by the God-Man. The blood of the God-Man is of eternal efficacy — once shed, it stands forever before God as the righteous basis of forgiveness. This is why John uses the present tense: "cleanses us from all sin." As long as believers walk in the light, the blood is actively cleansing — maintaining fellowship and keeping the conscience clear. Light exposes, the blood cleanses — together they restore and preserve communion.

Finally, John confronts the denial of sin: if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; if we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar. The remedy is confession — agreeing with God about what His light exposes. God is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse, because Christ's death satisfied every claim of divine righteousness. This is the beginning of the restoration of true church life: coming into the light together, confessing, being cleansed, and enjoying fellowship that is full of joy.

1 John 2:1–11 — Advocacy and the New Commandment

1 John 2:1–2

1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Exposition:

John writes with fatherly tenderness: "My little children…" His aim is not to condemn but to prevent sin: "that you may not sin." Walking in the light is meant to produce holiness. But John is realistic — believers still fail.

For this reason, he points to heaven: "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word Advocate (paraklētos) means one who stands alongside to plead our case. Christ does not beg a reluctant Father but maintains our fellowship on the basis of His own righteousness.

Then John declares: "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." The Greek word is hilasmós — propitiation, not merely "atoning sacrifice." Propitiation means that God's holiness has been fully satisfied and His righteous wrath turned away — by God's own provision in Christ.

Because the One who shed His blood is Jesus His Son, the blood is of infinite worth and eternally efficacious — always speaking before the Father (Heb. 12:24). Forgiveness is not God overlooking sin; it is God righteously forgiving on the ground that the blood of the God-Man has met every claim of divine justice.

John concludes: "not for ours only but also for the whole world." Christ's propitiation is sufficient for all, applied to those who believe. The door of forgiveness stands open because the blood still speaks.

1 John 2:3–6

3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.
4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.
5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.
6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Exposition:

John now gives a test of reality: true knowledge of God produces obedience. If someone claims to know God but refuses His commandments, John says flatly — "he is a liar." Knowledge of God is not theoretical but practical, resulting in a life that keeps His word.

Verse 5 shows the result: as we keep His word, the love of God is "perfected" — brought to maturity — in us. Love grows in those who obey.

Verse 6 then sets the ultimate measure: if we claim to abide in Him, we must walk as He walked. Christ Himself is our pattern — humble, obedient, righteous, and full of love.

1 John 2:7–11

7 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.
8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.
9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.
10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.
11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Exposition:

John now brings in the commandment of love. It is "old" because it has been God's will from the beginning (Lev. 19:18), yet "new" because it has been renewed and intensified in Christ: "Love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

Verse 9 is a prophetic wake-up call to modern Christianity: "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now." John does not leave room for neutrality. To claim to be in the light while rejecting, ridiculing, or hating other believers — whether through open hostility, gossip, exclusion, or sectarian pride — is to live in darkness.

This word exposes the tragedy of today's divided church life. Many believers who stand for the truth of Christ's Word have been rejected, slandered, or even hated by those in so-called churches. John's verdict is clear: such rejection is darkness, no matter how orthodox the outward profession.

The Lord Jesus Himself warned that during His absence some servants would begin to "beat their fellow servants" (Matt. 24), not with physical force but with words—accusations, denunciations, and the branding of fellow believers as heretical or corrupt. This is precisely the kind of darkness John exposes: claiming to be in the light while hating a brother. By contrast, Acts 17 presents a rare and illuminating example. When Paul and Silas spoke in Berea, the hearers did not malign or attack the teachers, nor did they accept their words blindly, but listened carefully and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Here discernment is exercised without hatred, testing without violence, and truth pursued in the light of love. This is the proper response when confronted with Christian teaching, and it stands as a quiet rebuke to last-days Christianity that defends "light" while walking in darkness toward its own brothers.

Verse 10 gives the contrast: to love the brothers is to abide in the light, free from stumbling. Love proves the light is shining. Verse 11 shows the result of hatred — blindness, confusion, and aimless wandering.

1 John 2:12–29 — Overcoming the World and Antichrists

1 John 2:12–14 — Assured Standing in Christ

12 I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.
13 I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one.
I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father.
14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

Exposition:

John reassures believers of their standing in Christ. Little children know their sins are forgiven for His name's sake — forgiveness is the foundation of fellowship. Fathers know Him who is from the beginning — spiritual maturity is measured by knowing Christ as the eternal One. Young men are strong because the Word abides in them, and they have overcome the wicked one — spiritual strength is rooted in the indwelling Word. This pastoral word reminds the church that it is not defeated but victorious in Christ.

1 John 2:15–17 — Love for the Father Versus Love for the World

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.
16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.
17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Exposition:

John gives a sharp command: Do not love the world. The 'world' (kosmos) is the system of organized rebellion against God — its values, culture, ambitions, and allurements. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. Our hearts cannot simultaneously hold love for the Father and love for the world — one displaces the other.

John describes the world in three categories:

- **Lust of the flesh** — sinful cravings and indulgences.
- **Lust of the eyes** — covetousness, greed, restless desire to possess.
- **Pride of life** — boasting in possessions, rank, status, and independence from God.

The world is passing away, and its lust with it. To set one's heart on the world is to attach

oneself to something doomed. But the one who does the will of God abides forever. This is a sobering test of where our love truly lies.

1 John 2:18–23 — The Last Hour and the Antichrists

18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.
19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.
20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.
21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.
22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.
23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

Exposition:

John announces with urgency: 'It is the last hour.' The presence of many antichrists is proof that history is moving toward its final crisis. The term Antichrist (antichristos) is found only in John's writings — 1 John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3, and 2 John 7 — and is used in two ways:

• **Future** — the Antichrist is coming, the final climactic opposer of Christ, corresponding to Paul's man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2) and the beast of Revelation 13.
• **Present** — many antichrists are already at work, denying Christ's person and preparing the way for the final deception.

These false teachers went out from the believers, proving they were never truly of them. Their departure made manifest that they were not genuine. The great dividing line is Christ Himself: whoever denies the Son severs himself from the Father. There is no fellowship with God apart from Christ.

1 John 2:24–29 — Abiding in the Anointing and in Christ

24 Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.
25 And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.
26 These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.
27 But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.
28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.
29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Exposition:
The antidote to deception is simple: abide in what you heard from the beginning — the apostolic teaching concerning Christ. To abandon this original revelation is to drift into error.

John calls the Spirit within us 'the anointing' (chrisma), deliberately echoing the holy anointing oil of Exodus 30:22–33. This oil was a compound of olive oil with four spices:

• **Myrrh** — signifying Christ's death and sufferings.
• **Cinnamon** — the fragrance of Christ's perfect humanity.
• **Calamus** — Christ's resurrection life rising up out of death.
• **Cassia** — Christ's power to repel Satan and every negative thing.
Blended with the olive oil (the Spirit), these spices typify the compound Spirit — the Spirit of the processed Triune God applying Christ's death, resurrection, humanity, and victory to us inwardly. The anointing teaches us concerning all things by imparting Christ to us: applying His death to our flesh, His resurrection to our spirit, His sweetness to our humanity, and His victory to our daily living. This inner teaching guards us from deception and keeps us abiding in Him.

John closes the section with a forward look: abide in Him now so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed. Practicing righteousness is the evidence that we are born of Him.

1 John 3:1–10 — Children of God and the Practice of Righteousness

1 John 3:1–3 — Behold What Manner of Love

1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.
2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.
3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Exposition:
John begins with wonder: "Behold what manner of love…" — literally, "See what foreign kind of love." God's love regenerates us, making us children of God (John 1:12–13). This is a present reality: "Now we are children of God." But our destiny is not yet fully revealed — when Christ appears, we shall be like Him (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21). This hope purifies us, aligning our lives with Christ's purity.

1 John 3:4–8 — Sin, Lawlessness, and the Appearing of Christ

4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.
5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.
6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.
7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Exposition:
Sin is defined as lawlessness (anomia) — rebellion against God's authority. Christ appeared to take away sins, removing them as a ruling power. Whoever abides in Him does not continue in a pattern of sin. The one who practices righteousness is truly righteous, just as Christ is righteous. Whoever practices sin shows himself to be of the devil. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil — and Hebrews 2:14 adds that He destroyed the devil himself, breaking his power over death and liberating those held in fear.

1 John 3:9–10 — The Two Families Manifested

9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.
10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Exposition:
The one born of God does not continue in sin as a way of life. God's seed — His divine life — remains in him, making sin foreign to his new nature. He cannot settle down in sin; God's life continually convicts, disciplines, and restores.

Paul describes the same reality in Ephesians 2:1–2, saying we once walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience. This shows unbelievers are not spiritually neutral but under the sway of another spirit.

🕮 Sidebar: The Seed of God — Regeneration and Transformation

- A New Birth — God's Spirit imparted His incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23).
- A Growing Life — This seed grows, transforming us into Christ's image (2 Cor. 3:18).
- A Power Against Sin — God's life resists sin; the Spirit convicts, disciplines, and restores (Heb. 12:6–11).
- The Goal — Christ fully formed in us (Gal. 4:19)

A Sobering Divide — No Third Category

John reveals the ultimate dividing line: there are only two families — the children of God and the children of the devil. This is shocking to modern ears but leaves no neutral ground (Matt. 12:30). Church attendance or good morals cannot make one a child of God — only new birth does. Its evidence is righteousness and love.

Loving the brothers is not optional sentiment but the mark of divine life. John says the one who does not love his brother is not of God — lovelessness is a sign of remaining in the wrong spiritual family.

1 John 3:11–24 — Loving the Brothers and the Assurance of Our Hearts

1 John 3:11–15 — Love as the Mark of Life

11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,
12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.
13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.
14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.
15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Exposition:

The message from the beginning is simple yet foundational: "love one another." Cain stands as the negative example — of the wicked one — who murdered his brother. Genesis 4 shows Cain's offering was rejected because it was without faith and blood (Heb. 11:4). Abel's offering acknowledged sin and God's way of atonement. Cain's jealousy became hatred, and hatred became murder.

🕮 Sidebar: Cain and Abel — Two Ways of Worship

• **Cain's Way** — The fruit of his own labor, bloodless and faithless, representing human religion apart from God's way.
• **Abel's Way** — The firstborn lamb and its fat, offered by faith, acknowledging the need for substitution and atonement.

God accepted Abel's offering but not Cain's. Instead of repenting, Cain killed Abel. John says Cain's works were evil because they rejected God's way of righteousness. This is the prototype of the world's hatred toward the righteous.

Expanded Note — The World's Hatred and Loveless Christianity

When John says, "Do not marvel if the world hates you," he is not only speaking of pagan society but the whole world system in rebellion against God. Tragically, its spirit can infiltrate religion itself. Wherever believers refuse to love one another, they are behaving according to the world, not God. Divided, sectarian Christianity that rejects or excludes genuine believers is functioning as part of the world-system. This is why John's test is absolute: the one who does not love the brothers abides in death — no matter how religious they appear.

1 John 3:16–18 — The Measure of Love

16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?
18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Exposition:

Christ's cross is the definition of love: "By this we know love." His laying down of His life is not just an example but the standard for Christian love. If we see a brother in need and refuse to help, God's love is not active in us. Love must be expressed in deed and truth — real, tangible, sacrificial.

1 John 3:19–24 — Assurance Before God

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.
20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.
21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.
22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.
23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.
24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Exposition:

Walking in love brings assurance: "by this we know we are of the truth." When our heart condemns us, God is greater and knows all things. When our heart is clear, we have boldness in prayer, and whatever we ask we receive because we keep His commandments — faith in Christ and love for one another — which bring us into abiding fellowship with Him. The Spirit within is the confirming witness.

Application — Love in a Divided Christendom

John's word is prophetic for our day. Christianity is tragically divided — denominations and groups in the same city often have no fellowship with each other. Many treat those outside their circle as if they were not believers at all. This sectarianism produces spiritual death: little hunger for Christ, little appetite for His Word, and even hostility toward those who love the truth. Those who stand for the oneness of the church are often treated as outcasts.

John's verdict is clear: the one who does not love his brother abides in death. Division, exclusion, and hatred are not minor issues — they reveal the absence of divine life. John calls the church back to the beginning: to love one another, to receive all whom Christ has received (Rom. 15:7), and to walk in the light together. Anything less is to walk in the spirit of Cain and align with the world's hatred rather than with God's love.

1 John 4:1–6 — Testing the Spirits and Overcoming the World

1 John 4:1–3 — Test the Spirits

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,
3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Exposition:
John warns believers not to be gullible — spiritual experiences and teachings must be tested. The test is Christological: "Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God." The verb (elēluthota) is perfect tense, stressing the permanent reality of the incarnation. Christ did not merely appear temporarily; the Word became flesh and remains the God-man forever. To deny this truth is to align with the spirit of Antichrist, which is already active in the world.

🕮 Sidebar: The Incarnation — Fully God and Fully Man
• **The Full Deity of Christ** — Jesus is eternally God, the Word who was with God and was God (John 1:1).
• **The Full Humanity of Christ** — The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The Greek word is eskēnōsen — "tabernacled among us," showing Christ as God's dwelling place on earth. Philippians 2:6–8 and Hebrews 2:14–17 reveal that He took true humanity to destroy the devil, deliver us from fear of death, and make propitiation for our sins.

To deny either His deity or His humanity is to deny the Christ of Scripture and fall under the deception John warns against.

1 John 4:4–6 — Overcoming the Spirit of Antichrist
4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.
5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.
6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Exposition:
John comforts believers: "You are of God." They have overcome false teachers, not by clever argument but by the indwelling Spirit: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." False teachers speak from the world's perspective and the world listens. Those who know God hear the apostolic word; refusal to hear shows the spirit of error. This is how we discern the spirit of truth from the spirit of error.

Application — False Christologies Today
John's warning is still urgent today. Many groups distort Christ's person: some claim He was a created being, others deny His real humanity, and some reduce Him to merely a prophet or teacher. All of these are expressions of the spirit of Antichrist. The true Jesus is the eternal Son of God, made flesh, crucified, risen, and reigning forever as the God-man.

Believers must test every teaching by its confession of Christ and hold firmly to the apostolic witness preserved in Scripture.

1 John 4:7–21 — God Is Love and Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

1 John 4:7–11 — Love's Source and Manifestation

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.
10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Exposition:

Love originates with God — "love is of God." Love is evidence of being born of God and knowing Him. Refusal to love proves one does not know God — for "God is love." The Father sent His unique Son that we might live through Him. Love is defined at the cross: Christ became the propitiation for our sins, satisfying God's righteousness and reconciling us to Him. If God so loved us, we are bound to love one another.

🕮 Sidebar: The Triune God as the Source of Love

• **The Father** — Initiates love by sending the Son (v. 9).
• **The Son** — Expresses love by dying as the propitiation (v. 10).
• **The Spirit** — Makes love experiential by indwelling us and shedding God's love abroad in our hearts (v. 13; Rom. 5:5).

To dwell in love is to dwell in the Triune God — Father, Son, and Spirit.

1 John 4:12–16 — Abiding in Love, Abiding in God

12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.
13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.
14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.
15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.
16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Exposition:

Though no one has seen God, His life becomes visible when believers love one another. Love is perfected when it produces fellowship and mutual care. The Spirit is the witness of this mutual abiding. Confessing Christ as the Son of God brings us into this fellowship. Verse 16 is climactic: "God is love." To abide in love is to abide in God Himself.

1 John 4:17–19 — Perfect Love and Fear Cast Out

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.
18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.
19 We love Him because He first loved us.

Exposition:

Perfected love produces confidence even regarding the day of judgment. We may stand boldly because "as He is, so are we in this world" — we share Christ's life and standing. Fear and love cannot coexist: fear anticipates punishment, but love assures acceptance. When love matures, fear is cast out.

1 John 4:20–21 — Love's Final Test

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?
21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Exposition:

Love for the unseen God is proved by love for the visible brother. To claim to love God while hating a brother is to lie. Verse 21 shows that love for God and love for the brothers are inseparable — the one who loves God must love his brother.

Application — Maturity in Love and Freedom from Fear

Many believers today live under fear — fear of judgment, rejection, or failure — evidence that they have not been perfected in love. John's word is a call to grow into love's maturity, knowing God's love has secured and accepted us. Likewise, division and sectarianism among Christians reveal that love has not reached its goal. Perfect love not only casts out fear but also casts out hatred, jealousy, and sectarian pride. John calls us to enter the fullness of God's love — to walk free of fear, to receive one another as Christ has received us, and to display the love of the Triune God to the world.

1 John 5:1–12 — Faith, Victory, and the Testimony Concerning the Son

1 John 5:1–5 — Faith, Love, and Overcoming the World

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.
2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.
3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.
4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.
5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Exposition:
Faith, love, and obedience are inseparable. Faith in Jesus as the Christ brings new birth, which produces love for God and His children. Love is proven by obedience — keeping God's commandments — which are not burdensome for the regenerate heart. Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. Faith is the means of victory, laying hold of Christ's triumph over the world (John 16:33).

1 John 5:6–9 — The Witness of the Spirit, Water, and Blood

6 This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.
7 For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.
8 And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.
9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.

Exposition:
Jesus came by water (His baptism) and by blood (His propitiatory death). John insists it was not by water only but by water and blood — countering early false teachers who wanted a Christ without the cross. The Spirit now bears witness, confirming the truth of Christ in the believer's heart and in the church. These three agree perfectly, and their testimony is God's own witness concerning His Son.

🕮 Sidebar: The Oneness of the Triune God (v. 7)

• **Three Persons** — The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit are individually named.
• **One Essence** — "These three are one," affirming their co-equality and shared divine being.
• **One Testimony** — The Triune God bears united witness concerning the Son.

This heavenly testimony is echoed in the believer's experience — the Father's love, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's witness all agree, bringing us into fellowship with the Triune God.

🕮 Sidebar: The Blood as a Continuing Witness

• **Eternal Efficacy** — The blood speaks better things than Abel (Heb. 12:24).
• **Ground of Access** — Boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood (Heb. 10:19).
• **Ground of Victory** — Believers overcome by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11).

The blood stands forever as God's testimony that sin has been judged, wrath propitiated, and reconciliation complete.

1 John 5:10–12 — The Testimony and Eternal Life

10 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of

His Son.
11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Exposition:
Faith receives God's testimony and results in an inward witness. Refusing this testimony is calling God a liar — the gravest insult to His truthfulness. God's testimony is simple and decisive: eternal life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life. There is no neutral category — life is entirely bound up with the Son.

1 John 5:13–21 — Assurance, Prayer, and Guarding Against Idols

1 John 5:13 — Assurance of Eternal Life

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Exposition:
John writes so believers may have settled assurance that they possess eternal life, and that they may continue believing. Faith is ongoing, not a one-time event.

1 John 5:14–15 — Confidence in Prayer

14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.
15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Exposition:
Assurance of life leads to boldness in prayer. The condition is to ask according to His will — aligning our requests with His purpose. When we pray this way, we know we are heard and that our petitions are granted.

1 John 5:16–17 — Intercession and Sin Leading to Death

16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and he will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.
17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.

Exposition:
John presents a striking view of intercession: the believer who sees a brother sinning will pray, and through that prayer he will 'give him life.' This does not mean the intercessor is the source of life, but that he becomes the channel of life — a participant in God's restoring work. This is not passive observation but active ministry: prayer that restores a brother to the experience of divine life. John also notes that there is a sin leading to death, most likely

physical death under divine discipline (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor. 11:30). He does not command prayer for such cases but leaves it to discernment.

Reflection: Called to Be Life-Givers

We were called into the fellowship of God's Son (1 Cor. 1:9) — the fellowship of eternal life. As ministers of the new covenant, we are ministers of the Spirit, and the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6). Paul said, 'Death works in us, but life in you' (2 Cor. 4:12). The Body builds itself up as each part supplies life (Eph. 4:16). Thus, when we pray for a sinning brother, we are exercising our priestly function, letting divine life flow through us for restoration.

1 John 5:18–20 — The Believer's Security and Knowledge

18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.
19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.
20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Exposition:

The one born of God does not continue in habitual sin. Christ keeps him so the wicked one cannot lay hold of him. Believers are of God, but the world lies under the sway of the wicked one. Verse 20 is one of John's clearest declarations of Christ's deity: 'This is the true God and eternal life.'

1 John 5:21 — Final Warning

21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Exposition:

Idolatry is anything that takes God's place in our devotion — not only pagan images but ambitions, possessions, religious traditions, or even spiritual systems that replace Christ. John calls us to guard our hearts and keep Christ central.

Application — Guarding Against Modern Idols

Idolatry today is subtle: religious traditions, denominational identity, or revered leaders can displace Christ. Even the writings of spiritual giants or theological systems can become idols if they take precedence over God's Word. Cultural idols such as wealth, politics, or personal ambitions can claim our loyalty. John's final exhortation is to keep Christ as the unrivaled center of our heart and guard the fellowship of the true God.

2 John — Walking in Truth and Guarding the Doctrine of Christ

2 John 1–3 — Greeting in Truth and Love

1 The Elder,
To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth,

2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:
3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Exposition:
John writes as "the Elder," likely the aged apostle. The "elect lady" is most naturally understood as a local church personified as a lady, with "her children" being the believers in that congregation. This fits the closing greeting in verse 13, likely referring to another congregation.

📖 Special Note: Could This Also Allude to Mary?
Tradition holds that John cared for Mary after the crucifixion (John 19:26–27) and that they lived in Ephesus. If this letter was written from Ephesus, "elect lady" may carry a double meaning — warmly acknowledging Mary herself while addressing the Ephesian church corporately. Mary, who bore Christ physically, pictures the church who bears Christ spiritually. Her "children" could refer both to believers she influenced and to members of the congregation. The warning about deceivers would then have added weight, since Mary was a living witness of the incarnation.

💡 Meditation: The Trinitarian Depth of the Greeting
John's opening is rich with theology:

• **Truth** is mentioned three times, pointing to the Spirit of truth who abides in believers forever.
• **Grace, mercy, and peace** form a threefold blessing: grace from Christ, mercy from the Father, peace applied by the Spirit.
• **"The Son of the Father"** affirms Jesus' eternal Sonship, countering heresies that denied His incarnation.
• **Truth and love bookend the greeting** — real love is rooted in truth, and truth must always be expressed in love.

2 John 4–6 — Walking in Truth and Love
4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father.
5 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.
6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

Exposition:
John rejoices to find some walking in truth. Love is not mere sentiment — it is obedience to God's commandments. Truth and love go together, guarding and perfecting each other.

2 John 7–9 — Warning Against Deceivers

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.
8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.
9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

Exposition:

John warns that deceivers deny Christ's incarnation — this is the spirit of antichrist. Faithfulness preserves a full reward. Departing from the doctrine of Christ severs fellowship with God.

2 John 10–11 — Do Not Receive False Teachers

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;
11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

Exposition:

Hospitality must not become a platform for error. To receive a false teacher is to share in his evil work. Christian love does not mean tolerating or endorsing false doctrine.

📖 Sidebar: Truth and Love as Twin Safeguards

- Truth without love becomes harsh and divisive.
- Love without truth becomes naive and permissive.

Healthy church life walks in both, welcoming all who abide in Christ while refusing to support those who distort Him.

2 John 12–13 — Closing

12 Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.
13 The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen.

Exposition:

John longs for face-to-face fellowship — written words are good, but presence brings fullness of joy. The greeting from 'your elect sister' likely refers to another congregation, underscoring the fellowship between local churches.

3 John — Walking in Truth and Supporting the Work of God

3 John 1–4 — Greeting and Commendation of Gaius

1 The Elder,
To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:
2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul

prospers.
3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.
4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Exposition:
John writes personally to Gaius, a faithful believer. He prays for Gaius' outward well-being to match his inner, spiritual health. John rejoices that Gaius is walking in truth — not merely believing correct doctrine, but living in the reality of it. Nothing gives John greater joy than to know that his spiritual children are walking in truth.

3 John 5–8 — Hospitality Commended
5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers,
6 who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,
7 because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.
8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

Exposition:
Gaius is commended for his support of traveling workers who went out for the sake of the Name. These workers refused worldly support and depended on the love of the church. By receiving and sending them in a manner worthy of God, believers share in their labor and reward, becoming fellow workers for the truth.

3 John 9–10 — The Problem of Diotrephes
9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.
10 Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

Exposition:
Diotrephes is a sobering negative example. He loves to be first, rejects apostolic authority, spreads malicious talk, refuses hospitality to faithful workers, and even expels those who welcome them. John warns against such pride and sectarian control and is prepared to confront these actions personally.

3 John 11–12 — The Good Example of Demetrius
11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.
12 Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

Exposition:
John exhorts Gaius not to imitate Diotrephes' evil but to imitate what is good. Demetrius stands as a shining example — a man whose life is aligned with truth and confirmed by

multiple witnesses. Such men should be imitated, for they are living demonstrations of the truth.

📖 Reflection: Three Types of People in Church Life

This short letter presents three kinds of people we still meet in church life today. Gaius is the faithful brother, walking in truth and supporting God's work. Diotrephes is the proud opposer, rejecting authority and suppressing fellowship. Demetrius is the good example, living in truth and worthy of imitation. John calls us to stand with those like Gaius and Demetrius — faithful, truthful, and supportive — and to reject the spirit of Diotrephes.

3 John 13–14 — Closing

13 I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink;
14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

Exposition:

John expresses his longing for personal fellowship, which brings fullness of joy. His mention of greeting 'friends by name' highlights the personal, relational character of church life — warm, familial, and full of genuine love.

Addendum — Love and Truth: The Two Balances of John

John's three epistles present two great balancing realities: love and truth.

In 1 John, John emphasizes that eternal life brings us into fellowship with God, walking in light and loving the brothers. Love is the proof that we have passed from death into life (1 John 3:14).
In 2 John, he warns that love must not be blind — it must be governed by truth. We must not receive or endorse those who deny Christ, for to do so is to share in their evil deeds (2 John 10–11).
In 3 John, John shows the balance from the other side: truth must not become cold or harsh but must work itself out in love and hospitality, as seen in Gaius' care for the workers.

These two — love and truth — are not optional virtues to be chosen according to preference. They are two sides of the same reality in Christ.

- **Truth without love** becomes proud, harsh, and divisive.
- **Love without truth** becomes sentimental, undiscerning, and permissive of evil.

The church needs both:

- **Truth** to anchor her in Christ and guard her from error.
- **Love** to express Christ's heart and build up the fellowship of life.

This is John's final burden: that the children of God would walk in truth and love together — a balanced testimony of Christ in a dark and divided world.